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## No Pestilence at the Border

Lindsay Garcia

**ABSTRACT** In this poem, I explore what various politicians have stated about immigrants using pest metaphors while interweaving pest control discourses. A pest is an animal that is "out of place." Immigrants, too, are often "out of place" or "uprooted" or in between places. They live between the world in which they are from and the world in which they inhabit presently, never fully fitting into either world. As there is a multiplicity of immigrants who choose to cross the border from Mexico, there is also a multiplicity of pests who cross different kinds of borders and boundaries. Pests and immigrants are liminal beings, making some people uneasy. My intention here is not to universalize the figure of the immigrant nor the figure of the pest, but instead to explore the complications of immigration-pest discourse in US political cultures.

### Introduction

"They treat us like pests," remarked an El Salvadoran man attempting to acquire health care in the Washington DC area in 2012.<sup>1</sup> More than 100 years earlier, the 1911 Dillingham Immigration Commission, a federal bipartisan effort to study issues related to immigration from 1907–1911, stated: "We should exercise at least as much care in admitting human beings [to the United States] as we exercise in relation to animals or insect pests or disease germs."<sup>2</sup> These kinds of xenophobic comparisons are historic and commonplace in American history, although they have shifted over time based on different historic, international, and cultural events and conflicts that target particular populations. With recent events such as President Donald Trump's plan to build an impenetrable wall between the United States and Mexico, and make Mexico pay for it, these immigrant-pest correlations continue to escalate, especially in the American media.<sup>3</sup>

*No Pestilence at the Border* explores the political rhetoric of immigration as it pertains to pest metaphors and pest control discourse, specifically how it plays out in the media regarding crossings of the US-Mexico border. The most basic definition of a "pest" is an animal that is "out of place," a phrase that borrows from Mary Douglas's foundational structuralist text *Purity and Danger* on dirt and taboos.<sup>4</sup> Immigrants, too, are often "out of place," displaced, or in between places. They live between the world in which they are from and the world in which they inhabit presently. There is no universal immigrant. Instead, there are a multiplicity of immigrants who choose or are coerced to cross the US-Mexican border due to factors such as labor, climate, and family, among others; these people are also differentiated by many diverse elements such as identity, ability, health, nationality, ethnicity, race, class, gender/sex, employment status, and familial organization. There are also a myriad of different kinds of pests with different species, origins, morphologies, behavioral tactics, social, and cultural structures. While immigrants and pests are not equivalent in their challenges and oppressions, they are both liminal figures, and this liminal-ness makes some people uncomfortable.

*No Pestilence at the Border* evolved from exploring recent rhetorical comparisons between immigrants and pests made by Republican politicians and their supporters.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, even if I am advocating that we review how we think about pest animals, it is always already problematic to draw any kind of parallel between marginalized humans and nonhumans. While there is no essential correlation between immigrants and pests, and to say so would encourage further prejudice, there is a historical, rhetorical, and material entanglement. For instance, I recently studied the long entangled history of African Americans and American cockroaches that began on the slave ship.<sup>6</sup> Recognizing this entanglement allows us to step back and subvert the rhetoric that disempowers immigrants as well as uproot the long-existing ideologies and discriminations of these marginalized human and nonhumans. There has to be a way to advocate for both the marginalized humans and the marginalized nonhumans of the politician's rants.

One method would be to appropriate the metaphorical parallels between immigrants and nonhuman pests, turn them on their head, and use them in a positive manner toward pro-immigration activism. One pro-immigration Latinx activist Xavier Hermosillo has already embraced the sentiment of a future "invasion" of Hispanic immigrants: "We will take over house by house, block by block. We may not overcome, but we will overwhelm."<sup>7</sup> While there are problems with this tactic as well, Hermosillo's use of pestilent rhetoric comes at the issue from a place of empowerment instead of dehumanization. The adoption of pestilent rhetoric, in the spirit of feminists taking back the word "cunt," could be used to say something like "Yes, we are rats; your impenetrable walls don't scare us; we will always find ways to overcome your surveillance, your above and below ground sensors; we will climb over your walls."<sup>8</sup> The work that I am suggesting is absurdist, and it is also important to note that crossing the border is not always a fully empowered choice or a playful hike through the desert. There is a whole system of coyotes, the side effects of human trafficking, intersections with drug cartels and Minutemen, dust, dehydration, and heat exhaustion, snakes, and other animals.<sup>9</sup> And once you make it, if you don't die in the desert or get discovered and sent back to Mexico, there are challenges like finding housing, employment, and resources, and constantly avoiding the notice of ICE and INS, among others.

The following poem appropriates anti-immigration pest rhetoric yet recognizes the strength of individuals who cross or attempt to cross the US-Mexico border. The poem vacillates between narrators and voices, attempting to capture some of the challenges and nuances of immigrant-pest correlatives and entangled histories as well as the experiences of border-crossers and those who support them stateside. Art and language have the power to shape the world and to improve the lives of humans and nonhumans in different and intersecting ways by stepping outside of traditional visual juxtapositions and grammar structures to envision a more hospitable world for all.

## Poem

You came here  
to live in the shadows<sup>10</sup>  
amongst the drops of rain  
that commingle on branches  
in the morning<sup>11</sup>

You came here  
thirsty<sup>12</sup>

in the shadows of ships  
slave ships even  
hitching a ride from the West Coast of Africa  
to the Southern United States<sup>13</sup>

You came here  
in the shadows of trade routes  
thirsty<sup>14</sup>  
from China to Europe  
in the Middle Ages<sup>15</sup>

You scurried here<sup>16</sup>  
last week  
from Mexico  
across the desert  
thirsty  
thirsty  
thirsty

You came here  
to live in the shadows

You didn't come here  
thirsty  
with an expectation  
that you would demand  
a path to citizenship<sup>17</sup>

You will eat all my food  
or spoil it  
with your little leg hairs  
and shit<sup>18</sup>

I leave droplets of water

for you<sup>19</sup>

Angels and ranchers

leave buckets of water

for you<sup>20</sup>

No matter what I do

your thirst drives you

to penetrate the wall<sup>21</sup>

through cracks

crevices

weak links

You are rapists<sup>22</sup>

penetrating my home

the ears and eyes of my children<sup>23</sup>

You can go out there

like rats

and multiply<sup>24</sup>

making your own children

playing with mine<sup>25</sup>

You operate in the dark<sup>26</sup>

You come across the borders

like rats and roaches

in the woodpile<sup>27</sup>

like rats and roaches

in the stowage of ships<sup>28</sup>

stowaways

on boats and rafts and swimming

The reason you are so bad now

they believe

is because of the warm winters<sup>29</sup>

They think

we've got to get control

They think

that's what we need to know

They think

that you are a monster

created to slay

at the end of the day<sup>30</sup>

They want to kill the rat

and break up the families of the rat<sup>31</sup>

They don't want you to come back

They don't want to let you use their deodorant

or drink their water

or sleep in their beds<sup>32</sup>

They say

you don't belong

in their house

at all

They say

they don't even have to kill you

just use e-verification of citizenship<sup>33</sup>

that you will find the conditions so intolerable<sup>34</sup>

that you will head back to the nest

They say

you are just a little bigger

than a grasshopper<sup>35</sup>

that you'll scatter  
and they'll be able to catch you.

Securing our borders is just like securing our homes<sup>36</sup>

A border with no fence  
is like a house with no doors  
where you can come and go as you please.<sup>37</sup>

I left you water last night too

I don't want you to die in the desert

They say they will build a wall  
but there are already walls<sup>38</sup>

Humans have built walls  
around their homes  
states  
countries  
to keep pests like you out  
since the beginning of time

And you have  
always penetrated them  
always came in  
uninvited

Your thirst drove you

No matter what I do  
no matter what I do  
you always come in  
swarms, and infestations  
and no matter what I do

you always come in

You never give up

You rise up<sup>39</sup>

Thirsty

You climb over my wall.






## Notes

1. Carol Cleaveland and Emily S. Ihara, "‘They Treat us Like Pests:’ Undocumented Immigrant Experiences Obtaining Health Care in the Wake of a Crackdown Ordinance," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 22 (2012): 783–784. [↗](#)
2. Quoted in Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples At Home and Abroad, 1876– 1917* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001), 199. [↗](#)
3. In a speech on August 31, 2016, then President-Elect Donald J. Trump announced that he was going to build a wall on the US-Mexico border and make Mexico pay for it:

Number one, are you ready? Are you ready? We will build a great wall along the southern border. And Mexico will pay for the wall. One hundred percent. They don't know it yet, but they're going to pay for it. And they're great people and great leaders but they're going to pay for the wall. On day one, we will begin working on intangible, physical, tall, power, beautiful southern border wall. We will use the best technology, including above and below ground sensors that's the tunnels. Remember that, above and below. Above and below ground sensors. Towers, aerial surveillance and manpower to supplement the wall, find and dislocate tunnels and keep out criminal cartels and Mexico you know that, will work with us. I really believe it. Mexico will work with us. I absolutely believe it. And especially after meeting with their wonderful, wonderful president today. I really believe they want to solve this problem along with us, and I'm sure they will."

Quoted in *Los Angeles Times* staff, "Transcript: Donald Trump's full immigration speech, annotated," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-donald-trump-immigration-speech-transcript-20160831-snap-htmstory.html>. [↗](#)

4. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 44. [↗](#)
5. For clarification, not all Republican politicians are xenophobic or racist, and not all compare humans and nonhuman animals. And there are Democrats and people with other party affiliations who are or who do, but to provide further detail is outside the scope of this particular introduction and poem. [↗](#)
6. Lindsay Garcia, "American Cockroaches, Racism, and the Ecology of the Slave Ship," *Arcadia*, no. 29 (Autumn 2017), <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8048>. [↗](#)

7. Although Herмосilla is a Republican, he is very pro-immigration. Partially quoted in *Los Angeles Times* staff, "The Talk of the Town: KMPC's Xavier Herмосilla Finally Smashed Through Los Angeles Radio's Ethnic Barrier in 1994," *Los Angeles Times*, January 01, 1995, [http://articles.latimes.com/1995-01-01/news/ci-15608\\_1\\_los-angeles](http://articles.latimes.com/1995-01-01/news/ci-15608_1_los-angeles). The full quotation comes from a far-right publication which censures Herмосilla for his liberal immigration views: Thomas Clough, "Thunder in Arizona," *Weird Republic*, June 8, 2010, <http://www.weirdrepublic.com/episode113.htm>. 
8. For more information on the history of the word "cunt" as it pertains to women, please see Inga Muscio, *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence, Expanded and Updated Second Edition* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2002). 
9. On the biological and ecological challenges of crossing the US-Mexican border: Edward Helmore, "'Death map' of deserts aims to save lives of desperate Mexican migrants," *The Guardian*, June 1, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/01/map-us-mexico-migrant-deaths-border>. 
10. "Living in the shadows" is a common metaphor utilized by many different people, disciplinary fields, and media genres/perspectives for those who experience the daily challenges of being an undocumented immigrant. Representative Steve King (R-IA) argues that Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients should be relegated to the margins of society instead of receiving the government protection afforded to them during the Obama era. On September 6, 2017, King stated, "They continue to live the objective that they sought to achieve when they illegally entered America. Live in the shadows. Live in the shadows and if you get crossways with the law, then the law requires they be placed in criminal proceedings and go home. I think there's justice there, but we need to provide justice." Quoted in Lauren Fox, "Rep. Steve King: DACA recipients should 'live in the shadows,'" *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/06/politics/steve-king-daca-shadow-comments/index.html>. 
11. One of the main causes of immigration to the United States from Central and South America is climate change. Essentially, the heating climate creates drought, which forces those who work in agriculture and other jobs to venture north in search of wetter land and more resources to help with field irrigation. This is well argued in Part IV of Christian Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (New York: Nation Books, 2012). 
12. Thirst and not having enough potable water are huge problems for those brave souls who attempt to cross the US-Mexico border. This is well documented in Jason De León, "Better to Be Hot than Caught': Excavating the Conflicting Roles of Migrant Material Culture," *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 3 (2012): 477–495. Additionally, law enforcement or local militias such as the Minutemen harass many people and organizations that leave water caches in the desert. One such story is documented in Adam Cohen, "The Crime of Giving Water to Thirsty People," *TIME*, September 8, 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2016513,00.html>. Additionally, artists endeavor to use technologies to navigate immigrants to water caches, such as Electronic Disturbance Theater (headed by Ricardo Dominguez and Brett Stalbaum) and b.a.n.g. lab who produced *The Transborder Immigrant Tool*, described in Leila Nadir, "Poetry, Immigration and the FBI: The Transborder Immigrant Tool,"



*Hyperallergic*, July 23, 2012, <https://hyperallergic.com/54678/poetry-immigration-and-the-fbi-the-transborder-immigrant-tool/>. ↗

13. For the historical entanglement between African Americans and American cockroaches, see Garcia, “American Cockroaches, Racism, and the Ecology of the Slave Ship.” For documentation of the American cockroach venturing to the United States on slave ships, see James A. G. Rehn, “Man’s Fellow Traveler—The Cockroach,” *The Scientific Monthly* 61, no. 4 (October 1945): 265–276. For the proving of the slave ship as not the only way that American cockroaches came to the United States, see William J. Bell and K. G. Adiyodi, eds., *The American Cockroach* (London and New York: Chapman and Hall, 1981). ↗
14. One of the main ways that humans kill mice and rats (at industrial scales, no less) is by feeding them a particular type of poison called D-Con. How D-Con works is that it slowly dehydrates the rodents and forces them to search for water. Ultimately, their bodies distend as they expire, hopefully away from human habitations. This is not a humane way of dying. Old school snap traps, with the instantaneous snap of the neck is much more humane. So while using D-Con against rodents isn’t the same thing as humans trying to escape from challenging economic and political situations and expiring of dehydration in the desert, the lack of humanity in both circumstances draws a sort of resonance between the situations. For more information on D-Con, see <http://www.d-conproducts.com>. ↗
15. Norway rats, the most common pest species in the United States, possibly originated in China and entered Europe through Norway via trade ships in the mid-1500s. It is possible that they arrived in the United States from Britain during the Revolutionary War. For a brief overview on the Norway rat, visit the *Global Invasive Species Database*, <http://www.iucngisd.org/gisd/speciesname/Rattus+norvegicus>. Another excellent resource is University of Michigan’s *Animal Diversity Web*: [http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/rattus\\_norvegicus/](http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/rattus_norvegicus/). ↗
16. The phrases “scurry across the border” and “scurried across the border” have been naturalized in the media to describe people crossing borders, especially that of US-Mexico. “To scurry” is an action that we would typically associate with small rodents such as mice and rats. Here are some news stories which use this metaphor to refer to migrants crossing the US-Mexico border: James C. McKinley, Jr., “On a Paper Border, Mexico’s Poor Hide, Scramble, and Hope,” *The New York Times*, May 25, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/25/world/americas/on-a-paper-border-mexicos-poor-hide-scramble-and-hope.html>. Blake Morlock, “Never Mind the Border Wall, Legal Immigration System Is the Big Fix,” *Tucson Sentinel*, December 5, 2016, [http://www.tucsonsentinel.com/opinion/report/120516\\_migration\\_op/never-mind-border-wall-legal-immigration-system-big-fix/](http://www.tucsonsentinel.com/opinion/report/120516_migration_op/never-mind-border-wall-legal-immigration-system-big-fix/). Jean Hopfensperger, “Immigration Law: El Salvadoran Family Fights Deportation,” *Star Tribune*, July 30, 2009, <http://www.startribune.com/immigration-law-el-salvadoran-family-fights-deportation/52032302/>. ↗
17. Representative Steve King (R-IA) said of undocumented immigrants, “They came here to live in the shadows, they didn’t come here with an expectation that they would demand a path to citizenship.” Quoted in Mark Hensch, “GOP Rep: Illegal Immigrants Here ‘To Live in the Shadows,’” *The Hill*, November 25, 2015, <http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/261286-gop-rep-illegal-immigrants-here-to-live-in-the-shadows>. King has a long history of desiring immigrants to “live in the shadows,” which has continued in 2017, as noted in footnote 10. President Barack Obama supported immigration bills that allowed for


paths to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, although Republicans in Congress continuously opposed them. David Nakamura, "Obama Pushes For Path to Citizenship in Immigration Bill," *The Washington Post*, July 16, 2013,

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-pushes-for-path-to-citizenship-in-immigration-bill/2013/07/16/63142a26-ee38-11e2-bed3-b9b6fe264871\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.06ca3a8938d2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-pushes-for-path-to-citizenship-in-immigration-bill/2013/07/16/63142a26-ee38-11e2-bed3-b9b6fe264871_story.html?utm_term=.06ca3a8938d2).

President Donald Trump continues to flip flop on the issue. At first, Trump suspended the DACA order for Dreamers, individuals who came to the United States illegally as children; however, later on, his administration allegedly supported a path to citizenship for Dreamers, stating that they should be allowed to stay in the United States. It's challenging to know today, November 28, 2017, exactly where the President stands on this issue.

Ed Kilgore, "Trump Administration Comes Out for Path to Citizenship, a.k.a.

Amnesty, for Dreamers," *New York Magazine*, October 3, 2017,

<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/10/trump-administration-comes-out-for-amnesty-for-dreamers.html>. 

18. The interiors of cockroach bodies do not serve as vectors for many diseases.


However, they do carry bacteria and other harmful pathogens on their leg hairs. For more information, see Elaine Bush, "Avoid Health Risks by Keeping Cockroaches out of Your Home," Michigan State University Extension, October 8, 2015,

[http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/avoid\\_health\\_risks\\_by\\_keeping\\_cockroaches\\_out\\_of\\_your\\_home](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/avoid_health_risks_by_keeping_cockroaches_out_of_your_home).

Additionally, there are an acceptable amount of insect particles and rodent feces allowed by the FDA in processed foods of which they call "defects." FDA Defect Levels Handbook, U.S. Food and Drug Administration,

<https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/SanitationTr>



19. This image is from the film *A Bug's Life* (1998, directed by John Lasseter and Andrew Stanton), specifically the scene where the protagonist Flik ventures to the city and ends up in a bar. The "drinks" that the bartender provides to his clientele are droplets of water or blood depending on the insect species. 


20. There are nonprofit organizations that help immigrants cross the borders by leaving caches of water in the desert borderlands. Border Angels is one such organization (<http://www.borderangels.org>). Humane Borders is another (<https://humaneborders.org>). Some ranchers also leave water on their properties for border crossers, although this is a controversial subject: Cindy Carcamo, "Arizona Couple Near Border Have Complex View of Immigration," *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/21/nation/la-na-ff-chilton-ranch-20130321>; Jack Jenkins, "What It's Really Like to Cross the U.S.-Mexico Border," *Think Progress*, February 10, 2015, <https://thinkprogress.org/what-its-really-like-to-cross-the-u-s-mexico-border-a375d80f3cc/>. Additionally, there are people who poison water caches or remove water from the desert to trip up border crossers. The Minuteman Project, which is now defunct, was a militia of concerned citizens who tasked themselves with enforcing tight border control. More information on that project can be found here: <http://baesic.net/minutemanproject/>. A 2012 documentary also describes their mission: <http://www.theminutemenmovie.com>. Shane Bauer went undercover with a border militia, and his account describes such incidents. Shane Bauer, "I Went Undercover with a Border Militia. Here's What I Saw," *Mother Jones*, Nov/Dec 2016,






<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/undercover-border-militia-immigration-bauer/>. 

21. While the verb "to penetrate" has multiple meanings including "to pass into or through," "to enter by overcoming resistance," and "to affect deeply the senses or feelings," the most colloquial use of this verb is in a sexual sense, for when the penis



penetrates the vagina during intercourse. Additionally, “penetrate” is often used to describe how pest animals cross borders and walls within the home. While this is not fully explored in this introduction and poem, there is a correlation between the fear of animals and insects penetrating the walls of a home, the fear of immigrants penetrating the political borders, and the fear of rape—something to be explored in future projects. President Donald Trump’s use of “rapists” to describe Mexicans further elucidates this connection (explored in footnote 22). “Penetrate,” *Merriam-Webster*, updated on November 14, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/penetrate>. ↗

22. President Donald Trump has a history of insulting Mexico and Mexicans. In the announcement for his presidential candidacy on June 16, 2015, he stated, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending the best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” Quoted in “Here’s Donald Trump’s Presidential Announcement Speech,” *TIME*, June 16, 2015, <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>. ↗
23. There are countless accounts of people who have had bugs, such as cockroaches, crawl into their ear canals. This article provides a list of the different species that can easily penetrate the body: Erika Englehaupt, “A Horrifying List of Creatures That Can Crawl Into Your Body,” *National Geographic*, February 14, 2017, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/02/roach-in-nose-ear-insects-science/>. The likelihood of this happening depends largely upon whether someone has an infestation in their home. Infestations do not occur evenly across various social sectors. The poor often cannot afford to live in homes that have proper pest control measures in place. ↗
24. One of the challenges that people face with rats is how rapidly they reproduce. This guide made by *Chicago Magazine* shows how within one year, 15,000 descendants can generate from a single rat: “Rats!” <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/March-2015/here-a-rat-there-a-rat-everywhere-a-rat-rat/>. Republican Tennessee state representative Curry Todd appropriated this notion, comparing pregnant undocumented immigrants to rats. He stated, “They can go out there like rats and multiply.” Todd argued that pregnant women should be required to confirm their citizenship status prior to being accepted for treatment at medical facilities. Although he apologized, stating that instead of comparing the women to rats, he should have called them “anchor babies,” he still admits to the original sentiment. Quoted in Nick Wing, “Tennessee GOPer Curry Todd: Illegal Immigrants Will Multiply ‘Like Rats,’” *Huffington Post*, November 11, 2010, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/11/curry-todd-illegal-immigrants\\_n\\_782102.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/11/curry-todd-illegal-immigrants_n_782102.html). ↗
25. While some children become obsessed with pest animals, such as Shelby Counterman, whose story was told on the TLC network (TLC, “Obsessed with Collecting Cockroaches | My Kid’s Obsession,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO2SjCtmB\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO2SjCtmB_Q)), others are traumatized and/or sickened by pest animals. Even some pest-species pets, such as rats, can cause troublesome effects, such as Rat-bite Fever (“Rat-bite Fever,” Center for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/rat-bite-fever/index.html>). Other species, especially insects such as cockroaches, can actually crawl inside of human orifices as described in footnote 23. See also this account of a pediatric surgeon removing a cockroach from a patient’s ear: Nina Shapiro, “The Cockroach in His Ear,” Dr. Nina Shapiro, accessed November 21, 2017, <http://drninashapiro.com/safety/the-cockroach-in-his-ear>. Additionally cockroach feces can cause instances of asthma for children who live in


infested homes. "Cockroach Allergies," Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, accessed November 21, 2017, <http://www.aafa.org/page/cockroach-allergy.aspx>. 

26. Many pest species such as cockroaches, mice, and rats come out of their nests and/or hiding places and into homes when the lights go out and the humans are in bed. It is also true that along the US-Mexico border, migrants have to do a lot of moving at night because it is the coolest temperature-wise and it is harder for immigration police to detect moving bodies. Additionally, migrants paint their water bottles black to evade detection from border officials. De León, "Better to Be Hot than Caught," 477–495. 
27. The mother-in-law (who goes unnamed in records of the event) of Citizens United President and Chairman David Bossie during the 2015 South Carolina Freedom Summit (which Bossie organized) compared immigrants to pests: "People are coming to this country across the borders like rats and roaches in the woodpile." User-created clip, "GOP Crowd Applauds Calling Immigrants Rats and Roaches," C-Span, May 20, 2015, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4537174/gop-crowd-applauds-calling-immigrants-rats-roaches>. 
28. For more information on cockroaches on ships, see Richard Schweid, *The Cockroach Papers: A Compendium of History and Lore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). For more information on rats, ships, and how they spread across the world, see Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 
29. Gerard Brown, program manager of the Rodent and Vector Control Division of the D.C. Department of Health (a.k.a. "the rat czar") commented on the growing rat problem in the city in 2016: "The reason the rats are so bad now, we believe, is because of the warm winters." Quoted in Petula Dvorak, "I Saw 13 Rats in 20 Minutes. D.C., We Have a Rodent Crisis," *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/i-saw-13-rats-in-20-minutes-dc-we-have-a-rodent-crisis/2016/10/17/ba7dcef0-949f-11e6-bb29-bf2701dbe0a3\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.af9c8977850c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/i-saw-13-rats-in-20-minutes-dc-we-have-a-rodent-crisis/2016/10/17/ba7dcef0-949f-11e6-bb29-bf2701dbe0a3_story.html?utm_term=.af9c8977850c). 
30. Javier Palomarez, the head of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce stated in response to then presidential candidate Donald Trump that "Immigration reform is a monster that he {Trump} created so he could slay it at the end of he day. It's not going to change things for this nation as we move forward here. We have to deal with a broken immigration system, obviously. But it's got to be done in a strategic fashion that makes sense on a going forward basis to fire up people and get this kind of hate-filled, you know, this movement of hatred. It doesn't solve anything." Quoted in Nick Gass, "Critics Ream Trump Immigration Address," *Politico*, September 1, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/trump-speech-reaction-227620>. 
31. During a 2012 appearance on "The Morning Majority," a conservative radio program, Republican Ken Cuccinelli, the former Attorney General of Virginia, made a statement in reference to Washington DC's current pest control policies and how he saw them intersecting with DC's 2010 Wildlife Protection Act, which he thought pertained to rats. He made an unfortunate turn-of-phrase which renders the bodies of immigrants disposable in a similar fashion to rats. Cuccinelli stated, "They have to relocate the rats. And, not only that, that's actually not the worst part, they cannot break up the families of the rats! So, anyway, it is worse than our immigration policy. You cannot break up rat families. Or raccoons, and all the rest, and you can't even kill 'em. It's unbelievable." Quoted in Nick Wing, "Ken Cuccinelli Once Compared Immigration Policy to Pest Control, Exterminating Rats," *Huffington Post*, July 26,

2013, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/26/ken-cuccinelli-immigration-rats\\_n\\_3658064.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/26/ken-cuccinelli-immigration-rats_n_3658064.html). 

32. During a Q&A session with Furman University Students on October 31, 2011, Representative Jeff Duncan (R-SC) stated “It’s kind of like having a house—and you’re not homeowners, a lot of folks in this room, but your moms and dads are—taking the door off the hinges and allowing any kind of vagrant, or animal, or just somebody that’s hungry, or somebody that wants to do your dishes for you, to come in. And you can’t say, ‘No you can’t come in.’ And you can’t say, ‘No you can’t stay all night.’ Or ‘No, you can’t have this benefit, using my deodorant.” Quoted in “Jeff Duncan, South Carolina Rep, Compares Undocumented Immigrants to Vagrants, Animals,” *Huffington Post*, November 2, 2011, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/02/jeff-duncan-south-carolina-immigrants\\_n\\_1071695.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/02/jeff-duncan-south-carolina-immigrants_n_1071695.html). 
33. The US Government requires that all employers verify the citizenship status of their employees upon hire. “E-verify,” Department of Homeland Security, accessed November 21, 2017, <https://www.uscis.gov/e-verify>. 
34. Ron Scarbro, author of a pro-Trump, anti-immigration op-ed in his local Minnesota newspaper *The Newsleaders*, compared undocumented immigrants to “vermin and pests.” He wrote,

The final listing on the Yellow Pages is Deport or Nail Aliens and Lowlife Drug Smugglers, or “DONALD’S.” Their operator is emphatic. Vermin and pests are just that, vermin and pests. They don’t belong in your house. You didn’t invite them in and they refuse to leave. If you don’t act and act quickly, they will gnaw at the foundation of your house until it’s destroyed. They will continue to reproduce, thereby creating millions more of their kind to destroy not only your house but your neighbor’s as well. Here at DONALD’S we have a special treatment that denies these pest and vermin food or opportunity. It’s called “E-Verification of Citizenship.” We don’t even have to kill them. They leave on their own because they find the living conditions intolerable. They go scrambling back to where they came from. Then DONALD’S builds a wall to prevent them from returning. At that point you can rebuild your home strengthened in the knowledge future visitors will be here only by invitation.





Quoted in Walter Hudson, “Trump Supporter Authors Op-Ed Calling Immigrants ‘Pests and Vermin,’” *PJ Media*, May 13, 2016, <https://pjmedia.com/trending/2016/05/13/trump-supporter-authors-op-ed-calling-immigrants-pests-and-vermin/>. 

35. Representative Ted Poe (R-TX) on the floor of the US House of Representatives compares undocumented immigrants to “grasshoppers.” He stated,

Now it seems to me that if we are so advanced with technology and manpower and competence that we can capture illegal grasshoppers from Brazil, in the holds of ships that are in a small little place in Port Arthur, Texas on the Sabine River. Sabine River, madam speaker, is the river that separates Texas from Louisiana. If we’re able to do that as a country, how come we can’t capture the thousands of people that cross the border everyday on the southern border of the United States? You know they’re a

little bigger than grasshoppers and they should be able to be captured easier.

Quoted in “Ted Poe: Congressman Compares Illegal Immigrants to Grasshoppers,” *Huffington Post*, June 30, 2010, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/30/ted-poe-congressman-compares-immigrants-to-grasshoppers\\_n\\_558576.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/30/ted-poe-congressman-compares-immigrants-to-grasshoppers_n_558576.html). 

36. Regarding Jeff Duncan's remarks (noted in footnote 32), Allen Klump commented, “Congressman Duncan was simply saying what South Carolinians already know, that securing our borders is just like securing our homes. A border with no fence is like a house with no doors, where anyone or anything can come and go as they please. Congressman Duncan believes we have to secure our borders and enforce our immigration laws.” “Jeff Duncan, South Carolina Rep, Compares Undocumented Immigrants to Vagrants, Animals,” *The Huffington Post*, November 2, 2011, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/02/jeff-duncan-south-carolina-immigrants\\_n\\_1071695.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/02/jeff-duncan-south-carolina-immigrants_n_1071695.html). 
37. “Jeff Duncan, South Carolina Rep, Compares Undocumented Immigrants.” 
38. It is a misconception that there are no walls or fences at the US-Mexico border. James Whitlow Delano, “This Is What the U.S.-Mexico Border Wall Actually Looks Like,” *National Geographic*, March 4, 2016, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/03/160304-us-mexico-border-fence-wall-photos-immigration/>. 
39. This phrase references both Andra Day's song “Rise Up” and Lin-Manuel Miranda's song “My Shot” from the musical *Hamilton*. 

 [Bio](#)



### Lindsay Garcia

Lindsay Garcia is a video, performance, and social practice artist as well as a PhD Candidate in American Studies and an Equality Lab Fellow at the College of William & Mary. Her artwork thematically engages with queer intersectional feminism, politics and current events, nonhuman animals and nature, human structures, and waste. Her dissertation explores how border and boundary crossings of pest animals and pesticides reveal issues of environmental justice from a queer, posthumanist, visual studies perspective. Garcia received a BFA in Sculpture from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), an MFA in Interdisciplinary Visual Arts from SUNY Purchase, an MA in Contemporary Art from Sotheby's Institute of Art, and an MA in American Studies from the College of William and Mary in 2016. Her MA Thesis “Capitalist Architecture in a Posthumanist World” won the Arts and Sciences Distinguished Thesis Award in the Humanities at the College of William & Mary. At SUNY Purchase, she won the Outstanding MFA Award, and at RISD, she won the Senior Sculpture Prize. Garcia has exhibited her artwork in New York (NY), Philadelphia (PA), Washington, D.C., San Jose (CA), Richmond (VA), Providence (RI), Wooster (OH), Torrington (CT), and Bergen (NJ). Garcia has published in *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* and *Lateral*.



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